

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 2291

To enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing plain language as the standard style of Government documents issued to the public, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 1, 2007

Mr. AKAKA (for himself, Mrs. McCASKILL, Mr. CARPER, and Mr. LEVIN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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## A BILL

To enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing plain language as the standard style of Government documents issued to the public, and for other purposes.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3       **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4       This Act may be cited as the “Plain Language in  
5       Government Communications Act of 2007”.

6       **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7       The purpose of this Act is to improve the effective-  
8       ness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public

1 by promoting clear Government communication that the  
2 public can understand and use.

3 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

4 In this Act:

5 (1) AGENCY.—The term “agency” means an  
6 Executive agency, as defined under section 105 of  
7 title 5, United States Code.

8 (2) COVERED DOCUMENT.—The term “covered  
9 document”—

10 (A) means any document (other than a  
11 regulation) issued by an agency to the public  
12 that—

13 (i) provides information about any  
14 Federal Government requirement or pro-  
15 gram; or

16 (ii) is relevant to obtaining any Fed-  
17 eral Government benefit or service; and

18 (B) includes a letter, publication, form, no-  
19 tice, or instruction.

20 (3) PLAIN LANGUAGE.—The term “plain lan-  
21 guage” means language that the intended audience  
22 can readily understand and use because that lan-  
23 guage is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows  
24 other best practices of plain language writing.

1 **SEC. 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF FEDERAL AGENCIES.**

2 (a) REQUIREMENT TO USE PLAIN LANGUAGE IN  
3 NEW DOCUMENTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date  
4 of enactment of this Act, each agency shall use plain lan-  
5 guage in any covered document of the agency issued or  
6 substantially revised after the date of enactment of this  
7 Act.

8 (b) GUIDANCE.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—

10 (A) DEVELOPMENT.—Not later than 6  
11 months after the date of enactment of this Act,  
12 the Office of Management and Budget shall de-  
13 velop guidance on implementing the require-  
14 ments of subsection (a).

15 (B) ISSUANCE.—The Office of Manage-  
16 ment and Budget shall issue the guidance de-  
17 veloped under subparagraph (A) to agencies as a  
18 circular.

19 (2) INTERIM GUIDANCE.—Before the issuance  
20 of guidance under paragraph (1), agencies may fol-  
21 low the guidance of—

22 (A) the Plain English Handbook published  
23 by the Securities and Exchange Commission;

24 (B) the plain language guidelines devel-  
25 oped by the Plain Language Action and Infor-  
26 mation Network; or

1 (C) guidance provided by the head of the  
2 agency that is consistent with the guidelines re-  
3 ferred to under subparagraph (B).

4 **SEC. 5. REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

5 (a) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than 6 months after  
6 the date of enactment of this Act, the head of each agency  
7 shall submit to the Committee on Homeland Security and  
8 Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
9 on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of  
10 Representatives a report that describes how the agency in-  
11 tends to meet the following objectives:

12 (1) Communicating the requirements of this  
13 Act to agency employees.

14 (2) Training agency employees to write in plain  
15 language.

16 (3) Meeting the requirement under section 4(a).

17 (4) Ensuring ongoing compliance with the re-  
18 quirements of this Act.

19 (5) Designating a senior official to be respon-  
20 sible for implementing the requirements of this Act.

21 (b) ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS.—

22 (1) AGENCY REPORTS.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—The head of each agen-  
24 cy shall submit reports on compliance with this  
25 Act to the Office of Management and Budget.

1 (B) SUBMISSION DATES.—The Office of  
2 Management and Budget shall notify each  
3 agency of the date each report under subpara-  
4 graph (A) is required for submission to enable  
5 the Office of Management and Budget to meet  
6 the requirements of paragraph (2).

7 (2) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—The Office of  
8 Management and Budget shall review agency reports  
9 submitted under paragraph (1) using the guidance  
10 issued under section 4(b)(1)(B) and submit a report  
11 on the progress of agencies to the Committee on  
12 Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the  
13 Senate and the Committee on Oversight and Govern-  
14 ment Reform of Representatives—

15 (A) annually for the first 2 years after the  
16 date of enactment of this Act; and

17 (B) once every 3 years thereafter.

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